

LINGUISTIC PARTICULARITIES IN THE TRANSLATION OF KOREAN TEXTS¹

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Abstract: During the process of translating a Korean text, one can face issues, not only from a linguistic, but also from a cultural point of view, some of them being syntactic differences, disposal of vocabulary to nuance meaning, writing systems and how they influence the use of language, social class and gender differentiated speeches, humorous structures, dialects and so on. We are trying to explore the possibility of translating Korean texts into English, whilst keeping in mind all of these issues related to linguistic relativity.

Keywords: translation, linguistic relativity, cross-cultural understanding, gender differentiated speech, social class differentiated speech, humour.

Translation can pose difficulties, regardless of the language pairs that are targeted. In our case, we will discuss translating Korean texts into English, whilst tackling the various particularities of the source language, from a theoretical, but also practical point of view. Translating a Korean text into English is not an easy task, for the two languages are diametrically opposite to each other. Not only do they pertain to different language families, thus have undergone different types of changes throughout time, but the physical distance between the West and the East has led to the development of divergent cultures as well, with different ways of decoding/interpreting reality. It is Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea that in different languages, the linguistic content is structured differently, thus creating the concept of linguistic relativity. Due to this linguistic relativity, problems in translation might arise. From a linguistic point of view, we must take into account that the two languages, English and Korean, are completely different from one another. The English language belongs to the Indo-European language family, while Korean is believed by some to be a language isolate, which means that it constitutes a language family of its own, the Koreanic family, together with the language/ dialect spoken in Jeju² island. The two languages have evolved differently, not only from a linguistic point of view, but from a cultural one as well. Bassnett herself observes these differences between Western and Asian cultures, differences that pose problems when translation is attempted. She says that:

“The problems become particularly apparent when translation takes place between Western and non-Western cultures. Lefevere argues that Western cultures have constructed non-Western cultures by translating them into Western categories, a process that distorts and falsifies” (2007)

She then continues to quote Lefevere (1999) regarding cross-cultural understanding and translation:

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² South Korean island.

“This brings us, of course, straight to the most important problem in all translating and in all attempts at cross-cultural understanding: can culture A ever really understand culture B on that culture’s (i.e. B’s) own terms? Or do the grids always define the ways in which cultures will be able to understand each other? Are the grids, to put it in terms that may well be too strong, the prerequisite for all understanding or not?” (Lefevere, 1999, as cited in Bassnett, 2007)

In this paper we will try to address these cultural problems, as well as particularities of linguistic nature. In doing so, firstly we will follow Peter Borbely’s list of translation issues. He believes that “Culture and language are intertwined entities, thus readers need to acquire a certain level of intercultural competence to gain a proper understanding” (2014) and that “cultural terms and references also have little resonance for Western readers, which also may disturb the reading process” (Borbely, 2014). We believe that not necessarily the reader has to acquire intercultural competence, but it is the translator who has this responsibility of aiding the reader to understand the culture, and to make the translated text accessible.

Borbely states that: “The main problems that the translators will face in the medium while translating are due to the incompetency of the two languages. For instance, in grammatical terms, the different word order may provide some difficulties.” (2014) He begins his list of issues with word order, which can differ from language to language. And in our case it does. English follows a subject-verb-object word order, while the Korean sentence structure is subject-object-verb. Korean language also employs several affixes and particles to mark grammatical function. Furthermore, besides from the verb being last, the language shows great flexibility, at times, while English does not. You can write a sentence in Korean in numerous ways, switching up the place of the words, as long as the verb comes last.

E.g.

몇 시에 학교에 왔어요?

myeot shi-e hakkyo-e wassoyo? – what time school arrived

학교에 몇 시에 왔어요?

hakkyo-e myeot shi-e wassoyo? – school what time arrived

Actual meaning: What time did you arrive at school? / When did you arrive at school?

There are, however, some instances in which the language permits even the subject, or the object, to come last, after the verb.

E.g.

안바꿨어요 비밀번호. *anbakkweosseoyo pimil bonho*

(I) Didn’t change the password.

The usual way in which this would be said is:

비밀 번호를 안바꿨어요. *pimil bonho anbakkweosseoyo*

The password (I) didn’t change.

Lee Chungmin and Cho Sook Whan explain this flexibility as following:

“As is well-known in the literature, Korean word order is, in general, regarded as fairly flexible; the preferred word order is either the SOV pattern, or a combination of SOV and OSV structures. Word order can vary for a variety of

reasons including topicality, focus, and emphasis, among others. The relatively free word order of Korean is facilitated by case markers that indicate the grammatical functions of the nouns used in a sentence. Korean is a discourse-prominent language, like Chinese and Japanese. Hence, sentences do not always require an overt subject or object when these elements are predictable from the discourse context. ...Likewise, case markers can also be omitted optionally or pragmatically when recoverable from the context.” (Cho and Lee, 2009)

In our example, the word order variation is actually used as an emphasis of the word “password”. The two linguists also mention the fact that many nuances of the Korean language can be predicted from the context, thus for a non-native speaker it would be quite difficult to grasp the exact meaning of certain utterances. It is our opinion that this prediction based on context can also pose some difficulty in the process of translation, and that translators should pay more attention to these subtleties of the language.

Other syntactic differences are: the position of adverbs, verb inflection and the position of relative clauses. (Cho, 2004) While in English the adverb comes usually after the verb, in Korean it always comes before the verb, thus the English sentence “He runs fast” would be “He fast runs” in Korean. Borbely maintains that: “certain grammatical functions work differently and it is important to understand the grammar of both languages to produce a correctly translated and comprehensible product” (2014)

Secondly, Borbely argues that the disposal of the vocabulary to nuance meaning can also pose a problem in translation. He claims that “the average English speaker uses about 10,000 words daily in their vocabulary” (2014), thus might have more at their disposal in order to express themselves. But Korean can form new words by fusing different stems together, and adding morphemes to change meaning, and so on. It is hard to say which language benefits from the use of more words in order to express thought, but it is true that Korean language disposes of ways of enriching the vocabulary and of forming new words, enabled by its very own writing system, which are unknown to the English language. This takes us to the second factor which might pose problems in translation, the writing system. While English uses the Latin alphabet, Korean uses both Hangeul and Hanja³. Hangeul does have a phonologic orthography, but it is a featural writing system. In Hangeul, the featural symbols are combined into alphabetic letters, and then the letters are joined into syllabic blocks, so that the system combines three levels of phonological representation (Sampson, 1990). One syllabic block is also a stem, and combining several syllabic blocks can generate new words.

E.g.

생 축 < 생일 축하 – *saeng chuk < saengil chukha* (tr. Happy Birthday)

프사 < 프로필 사진 *peusa < peuropil sajin* (tr. Profile picture).

생선 < 생일 선물 *saengseon < saengil seonmul* (tr. Birthday gift)

생선 *saengseon* also means “fish”. Actually, “fish” is the only meaning that appears in the dictionary, for the meaning of “birthday gift” is not officially recognized. Many other Korean words pose the same problem. Moreover, as we mentioned before, besides the

³Chinese characters incorporated into the Korean language.

official script Hangeul, Korean also makes use of Hanja, a set of characters borrowed from the Chinese *hanzi*⁴. These Hanja are not used in daily writing, but can sometimes be used in literature, and can indeed pose problems. Some Hanja can have multiple readings, such as 金 (금 *geum*, 김 *gim*) meaning *gold* and *surname*, 車 (차 *cha*, 거 *geo*) which means *vehicle* and also *to carry*, while other Hanja can have the same reading, such as 학 *hak* for 學, 鶴 and 虐, which mean *knowledge*, *crane* and *cruel* respectively.

Beside these linguistic issues, Borbely also mentions the social and cultural nuances that might pose difficulties in translating. These nuances in Korean are: humour, gender differentiated speech, social class differentiated speech, honorifics, wordplay and cultural references.

We will start with social class differentiated speech, or honorifics. Honorifics are a particularity of the Korean language, a complex and richly textured system that is most often times difficult to render in other languages. Lucien Brown cites Levinson (1983) whilst trying to define this concept as “the term for those aspects of language structure that encode the social identities of participants, or social relationships between them, or between one of them and persons or entities referred to” (Brown, 2011)

This linguistic phenomenon can indeed be found in other languages as well, besides Korean, such as Japanese, Chinese, Romanian, French, and so on, regardless of the linguistic group or area a language pertains to. Nonetheless, it is true that: “Although honorifics is a cross-linguistic phenomenon, it is important to recognize that some languages (such as Korean, Japanese and Javanese) possess far more developed honorifics systems than other languages.” (Brown, 2011) On one hand, in modern English the system of honorifics is not as well developed and is only apparent through the use of titles such as Mister or Miss. On the other hand, in Asian languages, the honorific system plays a much more important part. Korea’s honorifics system is very complex, mostly due to its hierarchical culture, and is apparent on several levels (such as vocabulary, syntax, and so on). Brown considers that “the existence of honorifics in Korean is frequently connected to the influence of Confucianism and the hierarchical, relational social structure that this has entailed” (2011) and “although the development and systematization of honorifics probably has much to do with the promotion of neo-Confucian ideology, the actual existence of honorifics in the Korean language appears to predate the spread of Confucianism to Korea.” (Brown, 2011), later quoting Baek Eung-jin (1985), who considered that “Korean honorifics were probably used in ancient times when referring to gods and kings and the use according to strict Confucian social hierarchy developed much later.” (Brown, 2011) We conclude that the honorifics system is an important part of Korean culture, thus all translations should take it into consideration, in order to preserve the authenticity and meaning of the original text. Brown then goes on to say that, even though this system is without doubt ingrained in the culture and society, the language’s agglutinating structure itself has contributed to the development of the honorifics system as we know it today. The linguist claims that

⁴ The name of the Chinese writing system.

“This typological property allows for the addition of honorific endings to each and every verb in a way that would not be possible in isolating languages.” (Brown, 2011)

In terms of their use, honorifics generally denote politeness, respect, social class, age difference, Potts insisting that “the expressive meaning of honorific forms is the expression of social superiority” (2005). On the other hand, Brown, although he agrees with Potts in a way, still considers that Korean honorifics might also have a deeper meaning. He says that:

“The underlying “meaning of honorific forms is probably more abstract, perhaps best captured by “separation” or “distance”: The absence of honorifics, on the other hand, expresses meanings such as “connection” and “closeness” (Brown, 2011)

Even though Korean language has structures that are intended to denote social superiority, such as the noun particle *님 nim* which, added to nouns, indicates a higher social status, some honorific forms do indeed show distance between two people/ two interlocutors. Such is the case of the verb ending *요 yo*, which is usually used to show respect, but the absence of this ending does indeed show closeness. People, of the same age or not, of the same social class or not, if they are close to each other will not use the verb ending *요 yo* when talking to each other.

In Korean, honorifics are classified in several categories, as following: honorific nouns, honorific verbs, honorific particles, pronouns and last but not least, titles. All of these categories are very important, and all of them are used on a daily basis.

As far as the nouns are concerned, Korean separates them into honorific nouns and regular nouns, and uses them in accordance to social status. For example, the noun *집 jib*, which means “house”, cannot be used when talking to a senior, or with someone of a higher social status, cases in which we would have to use the word *댁 deak*, which means the same thing. Other examples are: *이름 ireum* and *성함 seongham*, both of which mean “name”, *생일 saengil* and *생신 saengshin*, both of which mean “birthday” and *나이 nai* and *연세 yeonse* which mean “age”. These examples being given, it must be stated that not all nouns have honorific forms, and those that do are quite small in number.

In the same manner as the nouns, some Korean verbs have two forms, which are used according to a person’s status. To give some examples, we will mention the verb “to be” with its two forms, first regular and the second formal, *있다 itta* and *계시다 gyesida*, “to eat”: *먹다 meokda* and *드시다 deushida*, “to sleep”: *자다 jada* and *주무시다 jumushida*. Although, similar to the nouns, not all verbs have a specific second form, unlike the nouns, all verbs can be inflected with an honorific particle in order to show politeness and respect. An example would be the verb “to give” *주다 juda*, which

in formal speech becomes 주시다 *jushida*, -시 *-shi* being an horrific particle, which is added only to verbs. Beside the particle -시 *shi* that is added to verbs in order to show politeness, there is also the previously mentioned particle -요 *yo*, and also the ending -ㅂ니다 *b nida*. Each of these represent different levels of politeness and are used in different situations. For example, -ㅂ니다 *b nida* is more polite than -요 *yo*, while -시 *shi* is somewhere in between. These nuances are extremely important in Korean culture, and should be well mastered by the translator. Other honorific verb endings are:

-ㅂ쇼체 - <i>b shyoche</i>	}	very formal
-ㅂ니다 - <i>b nida</i>		
-ㅂ니다 - <i>shimnida</i>		
-오체 - <i>oche</i>	}	neutral politeness, used nowadays only among some older
-오 - <i>o</i>		
-쇼 / -시오 - <i>shyo/shi o</i>		

As far as titles are concerned, 님 *nim* and 씨 *sshi* are the most commonly used, and both of them practically mean “mister” or “misses”. 님 *nim* is generally added to someone’s position, to show respect, e.g. 선생님 *seongsaengnim* (teacher), 교수님 *gyosunim* (professor), 형님 *hyeongnim* (respected older brother), while 씨 *sshi* is added to names: 성수호 씨 *seongsuho sshi* (mister Song Sooho).

These are just a few examples, Korean honorifics actually changing speech on many levels, employing various other particles, sentence endings, taking into account various syntactic functions, subject and object agreements, verb tenses, and so on and so forth.

As English does not benefit from a well-structured and widely used honorifics system, translating these nuances from Korean may pose problems for the translator.

In order to compare the concept of politeness in English and Korean, Song Sooho states that “Korean politeness is considered discernment politeness because of its dependence on settled honorific forms or linguistic norms” (2014) and then defines discernment, based on Hill’s (1986) theory, as “almost automatic socially-agreed-upon rules,” which operate irrespective of the specific communicative goal of the speaker. In general, discernment politeness is defined by the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee.”(Hill, 1986), continuing to say that for Koreans “politeness is socially prescribed, meaning that the speaker, as a member of society, does not make his/her own choices.” He notices, on the other hand, the differences in English, saying

that “speakers focus on the delivery of a message and the choice of expression strategies in their speech” (Hill, 1986), giving as example the American culture, although in our opinion, the same linguistic principles can be applied to the English culture as well:

“According to Watts (2003), American speakers can choose from a number of different conventional polite remarks when expressing politeness. Thus, with its individualism-centered culture, American politeness heavily relies on the personal autonomy and general friendliness of people in maintaining conversation etiquette.” (Hill, 1986)

Thus, politeness is embedded in Korean speech, and it is not necessarily a choice, but rather a social obligation to use honorifics, while in English, the speaker has the ability to choose etiquette. This being the case, when translating a Korean text, the translator should find a way in which to render Korean honorifics into a language that does not have this concept embedded in their linguistic system.

Beside the social class differentiated speech, Korean also has a gender differentiated speech. Most differences appear in pronunciation and intonation, and cannot be detected in written form, however some vocabulary and syntax differences do exist, and the translator should be aware of them in order for his translation to be accurate. This type of differentiated speech can be observed in other languages as well, such as Japanese and Chinese, but Robertson notices that “Korean culture in particular appears to be rapidly casting aside masculine and feminine language differences in favor of a much more balanced language” (2013), trying to let go of the stereotypes about how a man and a woman should talk. On the other hand, he does acknowledge that differences still exist, fewer indeed than in the past, quoting Wardhaugh who enumerates the levels on which differences in speech might appear:

“Wardhaugh (2010) identifies many of the areas of these perceived gender differences, including: phonology, vocabulary, speaking styles, grammar, intonation, paralinguistics, titles, obscenities, duration, and intensity” (Robertson, 2013)

Robertson continues by comparing the two languages (English and Korean), saying that although the gender specific forms of feminine or masculine in English do not appear in Korean as well: “compared to English, Korean has a general absence of gender-specific pronouns, grammar, and vocabulary, freeing it from many of the problems arising from “he / she” or “actor /actress,” (Robertson, 2013), the second language does have other gender specific forms: “vocabulary reflecting male dominance is still occasionally found, such as words for females which hold negative connotations” (Robertson, 2013) because historically, Korea was a patriarchal society.

At a lexical level, Korean gender differentiated speech consists of certain words that can be used only by women and certain words that can be used only by men, such as:

- 오빠 *oppa*– only used by women, meaning older brother⁵
- 형 *hyeong* – only used by men, meaning older brother
- 누나 *nuna*– only used by men, meaning older sister

⁵ The translations are literal. Culturally, the words can be used to address someone who is older (but not by very many years), and who is not related to the speaker.

- 언니 *eonni*– only used by women, meaning older sister

If the words were to be used in reverse, they would have different connotations. Such as the word 오빠 *oppa*, used by a man would hint towards his sexual orientation (preference towards the same sex), or at least would make others think that about him. Actually the word 오빠 *oppa* can have very many nuances, according to the situation in which it is used. It can mean older brother, older male, a woman's love interest (thus could be translated with "dear", "sweetheart" at times), and so on.

Humour is another particularity that can be hard to translate, not only from a linguistic point of view, but from a cultural one as well. Yu (2007) considers that: "language is a cultural form, and that conceptualizations underlying language and language use are largely formed by cultural systems". Thus there is a strong connection between cultural representations of humour, what one social group considers to be humorous or not, and the way humour is expressed through language. Prodanovic Stankic highlights in her study this very idea that "perception of humour depends heavily on its cultural specificity [in the sense of what is humorous inside a certain culture]" (2017), explaining that "the reasons for this are closely related to the fact that language is firmly grounded in a group-level cognition that emerges from the interactions between members of a cultural group" (Prodanovic Stankic, 2017). and "as language and culture are in a dialectical relationship, it is clear that language is one of the tools, yet not the only one, for maintaining and indicating cultural conceptualizations through time." (Prodanovic Stankic, 2017). When talking about humour, very many aspects should be taken into consideration, fact which makes translation of humour quite difficult. Again, Prodanovic Stankic points out that:

"Taking into account verbal humour, it should be stressed that cultural conceptualizations mark not only humorous discourse itself, in terms of different levels and units of language (e.g. speech acts, idioms, metaphors, grammar, etc.), but also language use and community practices (e.g. when it is (in)appropriate to joke and which form of humour to use in the given situation)." (2017)

Traditionally, English humour is known to be full of sarcasm and irony, satire, focusing on the absurd, the macabre, and making fun of social class, everyday life, ineptitude and embarrassing situations. It has been described as "a strong theme of sarcasm and self-deprecation, often with deadpan delivery" (Bloxham, 2008). Samavati believes that British humour "has always been evolving around the issue of negative connotative symbol of expression" (2013), explaining that:

"The expressionist assertion of British humour in its very nature distances itself from the topic it is subjected to as well as the times of its practice; it is arguably a form of personification of opposition completely crude of the standards forced by influential elements of politics, religion, epoch or populism." (Samavati, 2013)

As far as the means of expressing humour is concerned, Sánchez Roura believes that one of the devices mostly used in rendering humorous remarks is the syntactic ambiguity. She claims that: "a great deal of British humour depends on playing with language in different ways, especially exploiting ambiguity at different levels" (Sánchez Roura, 1995). She differentiates between ambiguity due to bracketing, and ambiguity

due to labelling, explaining the two concepts. Firstly, she describes ambiguity due to bracketing as following:

“A characteristic of the English language which is highly productive in terms of humour is the question of attachment of a given element, particularly in the context of the verb phrase, understood here as the whole predicate or "extended verb phrase," where different categories of phrases may be concerned. Whenever the attachment of such an element, either a whole phrase or just a single word, is possible in different constituents, then ambiguity arises.” (Sánchez Roura, 1995)

Then she explains the concept of labelling as:

“process by which characteristics of the constituents of the sentence are given, at two levels: the morphological one, or category labelling, both of lexical and phrasal categories, which is something inherent to words; the syntactic one, or function labelling, of phrases within the sentence and of lexemes within the phrase.”(Sánchez Roura, 1995)

saying that: “Ambiguity due to labelling arises from the fact that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between categories and functions, and from the multi-membership of many words into different lexical categories.” (Sánchez Roura, 1995). One example of this would be “-Sally, you're pretty dirty. / -Yes; and I'm even prettier when I'm clean”. We can see an interchange between an adjective and an adverb. Beside this linguistic approach to humour, as we mentioned before, culture plays a very important role, which makes it hard at times to be translated and fully understood by “outsiders”.

As far as Korean humour is concerned, it also employs satire, parody and sarcasm. It is a witty way of also addressing certain social issues that are rooted in the patriarchal nature of the country, such as the issue of gender roles and overcoming gender barriers. Conflicting with South Korea's very own culture and importance of respect and politeness, it presents a kind of sarcastic politeness. It is risk-taking and physically-driven at times, also targeting sensitive topics. Blyth describes Korean humour as following:

“The aspirated consonants express the violence and passion of the Koreans; the many r's and l's their weaker side. Humour comes out perhaps in the clash between the two. Put in a more general way, the humour of the Koreans lies in the collision between the violence of their desires and the cold, immovable facts of life. The Koreans are hardy capable of the loftiest, philosophical, super-natural humour; where they score is in their feeling of the common life of men and women and tigers and dogs and bed-bugs.” (Blyth, 1959)

The author tries to highlight the close relationship between humour and tradition/culture, which is always embedded in the collective consciousness of the people. He also mentions in his book the extreme structure of Korean society, the effects of social inflexibility and the extremely mannered nature of the language, claiming that in Korean humour this apparently did not result in the kind of humor in which circumstances are reversed.

Since humour is closely tied to a social group's culture and collective thinking, as well as to its specific language, it is quite hard at times to translate humour from a SL into a TL. All the more so if we take into consideration the variations in humour and the linguistic devices that are used, which are most often than not culturally bound.

Raphaelson-West (1989) divides humour into three different categories as following: language-specific humour, culture-specific humour and universal humour. Seghers (2017) explains the language-specific humour as being “those jokes that depend on linguistic features for their humorous effect.” and gives us as example the following joke: “Q: What do a battery and a small construction site have in common? A: There are two poles.”. We can see in Seghers’ example that the principle through which a humorous effect was created was a play on polysemy, “more specifically, two words that are similar in form, but different in meaning, are confronted to create a certain ambiguity”. Humor based on polysemy, more often than not, is quite hard to translate. The author himself argues that “a translator would have to find a similar combination of words in the target language for the translation to be perceived equally as humorous. This requires either a vast amount of creativity on the part of the translator or similarly structured language pairs.” Moving on to the culture specific humor, Seghers defines it as “those jokes that depend on relationships between certain cultures for their humorous effect”, giving as an example the joke: “Q: What does the Loch Ness monster eat? A: Fish and ships”, a culture-specific joke which makes reference to a traditional British dish. This joke, besides being culture-specific, it is also based on the homonymy between the words “ship” and “chip”. Lastly, the author defines universal humor as “those jokes that do not rely on linguistic features or intercultural relationships for their humorous effect. However, the term “universal” implies that one would have to be aware of every culture to be able to determine whether a joke or situation is universally perceived as funny (Raphaelson-West, 1989).” Homonymy is another language-specific particularity that is quite difficult to translate. We will try to exemplify this with a Korean joke:

Q: 뱀파이어가 아침에 뭐를 마셔요?

A: 코피.

The translation of the joke would be: Q: What does a vampire drink in the morning?”, the answer being “nose bleeds”. This joke is based on the homonymy play between 커피 (coffee) and 코피 (nose bleed). Unfortunately, there is no humorous effect in the translation of this joke, because there cannot be any kind of meaning play between coffee and blood in English.

As far as the process of translating humor is concerned, Attardo (2002) tackles it through several translation parameters: script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy and language, considering that the script opposition and logical mechanisms should not be altered, since altering them might affect the perception of a joke. When talking about the other parameters, Seghers says that the situation parameter as well does not need to change, “unless the situation in question does not exist or is unavailable for humour in the target language. In that case, the translator should opt for a different situation” (2017), the target parameter “should be adapted to the target culture, as each culture has its own stereotypes and corresponding targets” (Seghers, 2017), the narrative strategy does not “need to change...when translating into another language, unless the format does not exist in that language or culture in which the language is used. In that case, the translator should use a different

strategy.”(Seghers, 2017), and that the language should just be replaced with its TL equivalent, in such a way that it puts across the same ideas as in the SL. The author continues to invoke Vandaele’s (2002) ideas that the translator should reproduce the source text in such a way that he gets the same reactions from the target readers, pleading that:

“...reproducing humour in translation seems to be a talent-related skill, since one may well be able to perceive and understand humour, but fail to reproduce it in translation, however much effort is put into learning it. Humour reproduction also seems to be dependent on the translator’s personal sense of humour. He or she may understand the humour of a given segment, but fail to find it funny, which may have implications for the reproduction of the intended effect in the target audience.” (Seghers, 2017)

Vandaele also talks in one of his studies about wordplay, which is both an important element in humour, and a linguistic phenomenon which can pose problems in translation. Wordplay can be humorous or not, and it is based on homonymy, homophony, homography and paronymy. Vandaele considers that “if we accept that humor takes root in incongruity and superiority, then we understand why wordplay is often perceived to be humorous” and some forms of wordplay activate superiority mechanisms: they require us to activate relevant back ground knowledge and invite us to find interpretive “solutions” to the incongruous communication” (2011). As far as the translation of wordplay is concerned, Delabatista (2004) considers that “whether serious or comical, wordplay creates linguistic problems of translatability because different languages have different meaning-form distributions”, but all things considered, he claims that there are situations in which wordplay can in fact be translated. On the other hand Vandaele claims that “despite Delabastita’s and others’ insistence that even wordplay is not untranslatable, it is obvious that verbally expressed humor stretches over a continuum from easily translatable humor to very resistant, “metalinguistic” humor”(2011). Thus he is trying to say that in some instances humour can be easily translated, because maybe the mechanism of it is not necessarily based on a linguistic principle, but as far as wordplay (here he refers to humorous wordplay) is concerned, it becomes more difficult, because this linguistic phenomenon is rendered differently in different languages.

Another linguistic particularity that is difficult to translate is the dialect. Dialects are linguistic varieties which may differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, spelling and grammar, while accents vary only in terms of pronunciation. The UK is believed to have around 40 dialects, which are dispersed regionally, such as: Cockney, Cumbrian, Geordie, and Kentish, to name a few. English also has a variety of accents, which are variations in pronunciation and are also dispersed geographically, since they derive from the phonetic inventory of the English dialects. On the other hand, while is does have several dialects, Korean has considerably fewer than English does. Excluding the dialects spoken in North Korea and those spoken by the Korean minority in China, we encounter the following territorially divided dialects: Gyeonggi dialect⁶, Gangwon dialects,

⁶ Also known as “Seoul dialect”.

Gyeongsang dialects, Jeolla dialect and Jeju language. In our particular situation, if a translator would be faced with having to translate a Korean dialect, there would be a 40 to 5 ratio. The question is: which one to pick? The translator has the responsibility to pick the closest equivalent. Dialects and accents, as linguistic varieties, are subjected to different value judgments and perceptions which are in close relation with the culture of said social group. People make judgments about their own dialects, and of others as well. Preston exemplifies this saying that:

“It is perhaps the least surprising thing imaginable to find that attitudes towards languages and their varieties seem to be tied to attitudes towards groups of people. Some groups are believed to be decent, hard-working, and intelligent (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be laid-back, romantic, and devil-may-care (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be lazy, insolent, and procrastinating (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be hard-nosed, aloof, and unsympathetic (and so is their language or variety), and so on. For the folk mind, such correlations are obvious, reaching down even into the linguistic details of the language or variety itself.” (Preston, 2008)

Perceptions which vary, of course, based on each group’s culture. Edwards summarizes that “... people’s reactions to language varieties reveal much of their perception of the speakers of these varieties” (1982). Koreans perceive the people of Busan⁷, speakers of the Gyeongsan dialects, to be harsh, serious and quite unfriendly, but at the same time very honest, judging by its pitch accent and simplified grammar structures which apparently make other Koreans think that the people of Busan like to get straight to the point, without trying to varnish their speech. Not all accents/ dialects are perceived in a negative way, Richterova exemplifies this by saying that:

“Although rural accents tend to be ridiculed in comparison to urban accents (Labov 1971), regional accents such as Yorkshire play a part in personal identity of their speakers. Despite some accents of northern industrial towns (such as the Birmingham “Brummie”) being stigmatized and not enjoying much popularity (The Telegraph, 2008), the Yorkshire accent has apparently always been perceived as likeable, and in a recent study at Bath Spa University, Yorkshire has beaten all other regional BrE accents and was perceived by the participants as “wise, trustworthy, honest and straightforward” (The Guardian, 2008). In a larger scale study by Strongman and Woosley mentioned by Howard Giles, speakers of Yorkshire accent were perceived as more honest and reliable than speakers of London accents” (Richterova, 2013)

Opposite to the Yorksire dialect we have the Cockney dialect, which has a more negative connotation for the speakers of other English dialects. The same author claims that

“Since the nineteenth century, Cockney has been perceived negatively as a “modern corruption without legitimate credentials, unworthy of (...) any person in the capital city of the Empire” (Santipolo n.d.: 421). The glottal stop, for instance, was formerly “a feature of lower-social-class dialects” (Trudgill 1990: 12).” (Richterova, 2013))

Through dialect/accnt, a character or situation is give texture, thus translating it with the standard variety of the TL would make the text lose its nuances. Thus some

⁷ Southern city of South Korea.

linguists have tried to come up with theories on dialect translation. One of them is BJ Epstein (2006) divides dialect translation into socioeconomic and geographical, the first referring to class dialects, and the second to a regional dialect for which the translator should pair with a close equivalent regional dialect in the culture of the TL speakers.

What we tried to do in this paper is to highlight a few linguistic particularities of the Korean language, particularities that can pose problems when translation is attempted, giving a few punctual examples. If the translator takes into consideration all of the issues that might lead to the misinterpretation of a text, than s/he can come up with an accurate and authentic translation, that is relevant to the target reader.

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